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The Place of Will in Meaning: On Signification and Intentionality

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Titolo in italiano: Il posto della volontà nel senso: a proposito di significazione e intenzionalità.

Abstract: In the present paper, an attempt is made to study the concepts of natural sign and given sign from Augustine of Hippo (354–430) to contemporary semiotics. The enquiry is primarily concerned with three issues: 1) to expound and interpret the notions of natural and given signs and to unravel problems of terminology; 2) to discuss the argument of intentionality considered as a criterion by which this division was originally based; 3) to review the contemporary debate within semiotics on the notions of natural and intentional signification.

Keywords: Intentions; Theory of Signs; Natural/Artificial Scenarios; Intentional Meaning; Typology of Signs

1. Introduction.

Reviving an ancient subject, in this essay I propose a study of the division between “natural” and “given” signs from Augustine of Hippo (354–430) to contemporary semiotics. Although the distinction of natural and intentional meaning in its various formulations is pervasive in the history of philosophy (Chisholm 1952; Rollin 1976) and it represents a milestone in the disciplinary field of semiotics (Deely 2009; Ullmann 1973; Todorov 1977), the concepts of natural and given signs have often been misunderstood. The drift of the present paper is, thus, threefold: 1) to unravel the notions of natural and given signs and to explain the basic terminology associated with these concepts; 2) to discuss the argument of intentionality considered as the criterion by which the division of natural/given signs is based 3)